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### Student Voices: Researching the Stillaguamish River in the Wake of Disaster

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## STUDENT VOICES

# Researching the Stillaguamish River in the wake of disaster

By Eric Kennedy

**On the morning** of March 22, 2014, a colossal landslide destroyed 49 houses and other buildings and buried a stretch of highway near Oso, Washington. It also claimed 43 lives. More than two years later, the scientific community is still attempting to explain the mechanisms behind the tragedy.

Over the past few months, I have investigated some of the hydro-geomorphic processes of the North Fork Stillaguamish River. In other words, I am trying to understand how the course of the river has changed over time. My work comprises researching photo archives – as far back as 1930 – for aerial images of the river and transforming them into quantitative data using Geographic Information System (GIS) tools. The goal is to deepen the scientific community's understanding of the Stillaguamish River and to shed light on the factors that led to the Oso landslide.

It is important that aspiring researchers like me continue to explore and understand the challenges facing a world threatened by climate change. Each small study builds on the others to shape a bigger picture. The clearer that pictures becomes, the better prepared we are to prevent future disaster like the Oso landslide.



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[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stillaguamish\\_River\\_39160.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stillaguamish_River_39160.JPG)

(For further information see:

<http://old.seattletimes.com/flatpages/local/oso-mudslide-coverage.html> and

[http://www.usgs.gov/blogs/features/usgs\\_top\\_story/one-year-later-the-oso-landslide-in-washington/](http://www.usgs.gov/blogs/features/usgs_top_story/one-year-later-the-oso-landslide-in-washington/) )

*Eric Kennedy, Seattle University 2016, graduated in June with a dual degree in environmental science and business economics.*